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ABSTRACT

A review of course evaluation results for 1973-74 at New College leads to the following summary conclusions: (1) Approximately 62 percent of the New College students responded to course evaluation questionnaires. (2) Courses in the humanities area received the highest ratings by the students over the year and courses in the liberal arts area received the lowest ratings. (3) Areas of particular strength for the college appear to be the "overall" quality of instructors and the student's perceived effort with particular regard to his attendance in class. Weaknesses include the extent to which exams are perceived by the students as helpful in learning and the extent of learning about skillful writing. (4) Factor analysis of the course evaluation questionnaire suggests that students rate the courses according to three dimensions. These are (a) the instructor inside the classroom, (b) the student's own efforts in the course including such things as attendance, time and effort expended in study, etc., and (c) the external parameters of the courses such as reading assignments and papers. (Author)

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COURSE EVALUATIONS: SUMMARY - 1973-74

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NCERO Report #11
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COURSE EVALUATIONS: SUMMARY - 1973 - 74

As part of the on-going educational research program at New College, course evaluation data is collected at the conclusion of each faculty-offered course. Historically, New College has experimented with a variety of different course evaluation procedures for the past 10 years. The current evaluation form, New College Course Evaluation Questionnaire, October 1973 edition (see Appendix A), was initially developed in 1972 with the assistance of the New College faculty who provided input as to areas of concern and specific questions they wished included. The first edition of the questionnaire was administered throughout the 1972-73 academic year. The current edition is essentially the same as the questionnaire used in that previous year with minor changes in wording and clarification of some questions.

Although the actual form of the questionnaire has changed from year to year, the New College faculty and administration have agreed on the following uses of evaluation results: (1) to provide information and feedback to the faculty regarding perceptions of their courses by students, (2) to provide the New College Dean's Office and appropriate faculty with an evaluation of the effectiveness of various programs within the College, and (3) to provide information about contributions of new and/or experimental courses to individual programs. The Dean and faculty of New College furthermore agree that information from course and faculty evaluations will not be used in personnel decisions unless the faculty person voluntarily and at his/her initiative submits the material for such use. Administration of the New College form is handled by the New College Educational Research Office and is mandatory for all courses.

PROCEDURES

At the conclusion of each Session of the academic year, students are asked to complete the Course Evaluation Questionnaire. Questionnaires are distributed in each class and are completed by the students during class time. Admisistration time is usually from 10 to 20 minutes. Respondents are asked to record their responses to objective questions on an Opscan sheet provided in addition to recording their responses and narrative comments on the questionnaire itself. Later, the Opscan sheets are separated and the original questionnaires are returned to the faculty. Students are not asked to identify themselves since it is believed that they will respond with greater freedom and honesty if responses are annonymous.

Data Processing

The data are processed using a prepared course evaluation computer program. The program produces reports for each individual class, a summary report by Area (Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science, and Liberal Arts), and a grand summary for the College. The computer printout sheets are photographically reduced to 8½ by 11 size and distributed to the faculty with each faculty member receiving the sheet for his course, his Area, and the summary sheet for the College. In this way the instructor is able to compare his/her own results with the averages for his Area and the College.

The report presented to each faculty contains the number of respondents as well as the percent of the total class responding. In addition, means and standard deviations on the first eighteen objective items on the questionnaire are reported. The range of possible means is from a high of 5 to a low of 1.

Additional data analysis performed but not presented to the faculty include ranking of faculty by mean response on each of the questions and factor analysis of course evaluation results. These latter procedures are performed for research purposes.

RESULTS

Table 1 gives the means on each of the 18 objectives questions and percent responding in each category on question 19 for each of the four sessions as well as an average for the year. In addition the last item in the table provides the averages of questions 1-18 for the year.

As can be seen from the table, the Humanities Area received the highest mean ratings for the year with the Social Sciences, Special Studies, Natural Sciences, and Liberal Arts ranking from highest to lowest behind the Humanities. It is interesting to note that the Liberal Arts Area courses are rated, on the average, significantly below the other areas. This lower rating in Liberal Arts courses may be related to the fact that courses in this area are "required" and all but one are given on the freshmen level. Consequently, students may view these courses more critically, i.e. less positively because they have not necessarily enrolled in them by choice. It is also noted that the Session III Liberal Arts courses are specifically rated very low relative to courses in the other areas. This may be an artifact of the inclusion of the course LA100, "Final Unit," in the ratings. This course was a required course for graduating seniors and much dissention and disagreement surrounded the course during the 1973-74 academic year. The particularly low ratings of this course may distort the picture of overall ratings of Liberal Arts courses for the year. Eliminating Session III from the year average, we find that the mean for the year in Liberal Arts courses is 3.63 which more closely resembles mean ratings of courses in other areas but still maintains the same position in the ranking of Areas.

The average response rate for the year was 62.5%, with a range from 67% in Session I to 60% in Session IV. The response rate is dependent upon attendance in the given class on the day that the evaluations are administered. Although this response rate is not unrespectable for questionnaire administration, it would be desirable to increase the percent of students participating in course evaluations. No effort was made this year to increase the response rate by follow-up of students not responding and the introduction of annonymity in responding this year did not significantly increase the response rate over previous years at New College. The fact that on the average 37.5% of the students are not participating in the evaluations of courses at New College introduces the possibility of bias in results. Students who are regular in attendance and consequently present on the day of evaluations may have different attitudes about their courses, in general, or the particular course and instructor than students who are not present. At present there is no efficient or economical means of obtaining information from non-respondents. However, individual instructors should be encouraged to review their results with the response rate in mind.

The standard deviations of means by Session are .24 for Session I, .22 for Session II, .26 for Session III, and .22 for Session IV. By using this information it is possible to review the data for items which are consistently rated high (+ 1 s.d.) and low (- 1 s.d.). Using this technique, two items consistently emerge as strength areas. These items are "Overall rating of the instructor in the classroom" and "What was your attendance in class?' The two items which emerge as the weakest areas in terms of student evaluations relate to specific aspects of the courses, "How valuable was the exam or exams as a tool to help you learn?" and "What was the extent of learning about skillfull writing?"

Factor analysis of results during the year suggested the presence of three dimensions which seemed to be tapped by the questionnaire. During the first three Sessions, the three factors emerging were (1) the instructor, (2) the student and the estimate of his efforts in the course, and (3) peripeheral tasks associated with the course. In Session I and II evaluations, the first factor was the instructor inside the classroom and the third factor was the external parameters of the course (peripeheral tasks) such as reading assignments and papers or projects. In the Session III evaluations, these two factors switched positions, i.e. the external parameters appeared as the first factor and the instructor as the third.

The mathematics of factor analysis are such that the first factor is identified and then all variables are adjusted by having removed from each the amount of variance which it contributes to that first factor. Because of this procedure, a relatively small shift in emphasis could explain the exchange of positions during the third evaluation with the second factor remaining a consistent second.

In any event, during the first three Sessions the students appeared to be making a distinction between the instructor's performance inside the class and the readings, papers and projects which he assigned. However, in Session IV, these two factors became welded into one. Consequently, only two factors emerged in Session IV, (1) the instructor and the course and (2) the student's own efforts in the course. Several types of rotation were performed in an attempt to restore the 3 dimensionality of the evaluation. However, all methods produced a clear two factor structure. By interpretation, from the clustering on Factor I, it is possible to separate Factor I into the two original factors. This method indicates that both factors are of the same dimensionality, but that the instructor inside the classroom is a more powerful cluster than the parameters of the course.

One possible explanation for the merging of these two factors over the course of the year has to do with increased familiarity of students and faculty as the year progresses. There is evidence that this development occurred gradually over the year and not suddendly in the fourth session. The evidence consists of small changes in the percentages of variance which the first and third factors accounted for in each successive Session.

It is possible that at the beginning of the year both new students and "old" students (separated from the faculty and academic environment for a summer) are more concerned with the professor's image and personality in the classroom. Accordingly, as the year wears on the students and faculty become more familar with each other and the often spoken of "classroom stance" of the instructor would become less prominent. The readings and other assignments would come to be considered an extension of the professor with the result that in a factor analysis both professor and assignments (learning tasks) appear to

become unified in a single identity.

This line of reasoning is offered as a possible hypothesis. There is no research in our possession at this time to substantiate such a notion; however, it does appear to be a question worthy of further probing since it relates to the larger issue of unifying classroom experience and outside study into a meaningful whole. Perhaps greater student-professor familiarity is a key factor in making study meaningful.

SUMMARY

A review of course evaluation results for 1973-74 at New College leads to the following summary conclusions: (1) Approximately 62% of the New College students responded to course evaluation questionnaires. While this is a respectable response rate, it is possible that non-respondents have very different attitudes about the courses than do respondents. This is an issue for further investigation. (2) Courses in the Humanities Area received the highest ratings by the students over the year and courses in the Liberal Arts Area received the lowest ratings. One possible explanation for this has to do with the fact that students enrolled in LA courses are most often in them to fulfill a requirement rather than because they have freely elected to be in the courses. (3) Areas of particular strength for the College appear to be the "overall" quality of instructors and the students perceived effort with particular regard to his attendance in class. Weaknesses include the extent to which exams are perceived by the students as helpful in learning and the extent of learning about skillful writing. (4) Factor analysis of the course evaluation questionnaire suggests that students rate the courses according to three dimensions. These are (a) the instructor inside the classroom, (b) the student's own efforts in the course including such things as attendance, time and effort expended in study, etc., and (c) the external parameters of the courses such as reading assignments and papers. There is some evidence that as the year progresses the first and third factors (i.e. the instructor and the external parameters of the course) merge into a single identity.

Specific summary reports for each Session are available from the New College Educational Research Office along with more detailed data on the factor analysis.

TABLE I

Mean Course Evaluation Results for 1973-74
by Area, Session and for the Year

1. Quality of class presentations lectures and demonstrations.

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	4	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	4.32	4.03	4.45	4.35	4.29
Social Science	3.97	4.13	4.29	4.11	4.13
Natural Science	4.00	3.95	3.96	4.23	4.03
Liberal Arts		3.90	3.34	3.86	3.70
Special Studies	4.25	4.15	4.31	3.92	4.16
College Average	4.09	4.07	4.01	4.13	4.07

2. How well did class discussion help in the learning experience of this class?

Humanities	4.20	3.84	4.22	4.18	4.11
Social Science	3.51	3.85	4.06	3.97	3.85
Natural Science	3.74	3.35	3.84	4.00	3.73
Liberal Arts		3.69	2.72	3.90	3.44
Special Studies	4.41	3.94	4.34	3.65	4.08
College Average	3.83	3.82	3.68	3.97	3.82

3. How valuable were the assigned readings to you in your studies of this course topic?

Humanities	4.27	4.08	4.22	4.39	4.24
Social Science	3.95	3.84	4.19	3.90	3.97
Natural Science	3.80	3.95	3.76	4.35	3.97
Liberal Arts		4.28	3.03	3.33	3.55
Special Studies	3.84	3.73	3.96	3.33	3.71
College Average	3.98	3.95	3.77	3.96	3.91

4. Value of papers, projects, problems and other additional assignments.

Humanities	4.11	4.15	3.96	4.16	4.09
Social Science	3.98	4.08	4.22	4.04	4.08
Natural Science	4.04	4.06	3.82	4.17	4.02
Liberal Arts		3.50	2.81	3.67	3.33
Special Studies	4.19	3.92	4.04	3.84	4.00
College Average	4.05	4.04	3.68	4.03	3.95

5. Did this course have a major focus or direction which you understood?

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	4	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	4.23	3.94	4.30	4.30	4.19
Social Science	4.11	4.18	4.22	4.09	4.15
Natural Science	3.91	3.95	3.89	4.28	4.01
Liberal Arts		3.90	3.00	3.36	3.42
Special Studies	3.87	3.89	3.97	3.90	3.91
College Average	4.08	4.02	3.81	4.09	4.00

6. To the extent that you agreed this course had a major focus, was that focus or director meaningful to you?

Humanities	4.27	3.92	4.11	4.10	4.10
Social Science	3.93	4.13	4.20	4.13	4.10
Natural Science	3.59	3.90	3.47	4.07	3.76
Liberal Arts		3.86	2.78	3.63	3.42
Special Studies	3.94	3.65	4.04	3.81	3.86
College Average	3.97	3.96	3.65	4.05	3.91

7. How valuable was the exam or exams as a tool to help you to learn?

Humanities	3.78	3.44	3.55	3.61	3.59
Social Science	3.45	3.52	3.73	3.57	3.57
Natural Science	3.58	3.32	3.32	3.64	3.46
Liberal Arts		3.00	2.62	2.80	2.81
Special Studies	3.39	3.25	3.75	3.35	3.43
College Average	3.52	3.40	3.25	3.54	3.43

8. Overall rating of the instructor inside the classroom.

Humanities	4.32	4.11	4.42	4.35	4.30
Social Science	4.10	4.22	4.38	4.16	4.22
Natural Science	4.04	3.85	4.16	4.35	4.10
Liberal Arts		4.10	3.34	3.81	3.75
Special Studies	4.71	4.51	4.59	3.86	4.42
College Average	4.23	4.19	4.06	4.16	4.16

9. Availability of the instructor outside of the classroom.

Humanities	4.14	3.95	3.80	4.00	3.97
Social Science	4.06	4.14	4.09	3.91	4.05
Natural Science	4.02	3.89	4.08	4.29	4.07
Liberal Arts		4.04	3.39	3.67	3.70
Special Studies	4.79	4.40	4.69	4.31	4.55
College Average	4.19	4.09	3.85	4.02	4.04

10. How well did the professor present the material/content of the course in a logical order that helped you to learn.

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	4	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	4.32	3.84	4.31	4.30	4.19
Social Science	3.87	3.99	4.14	3.98	3.99
Natural Science	3.78	3.60	3.84	4.15	3.84
Liberal Arts		3.79	2.97	3.50	3.42
Special Studies	4.38	4.07	4.34	3.82	4.15
College Average	4.04	3.92	3.80	4.01	3.94

11. Did the course assume an appropriate level of prior knowledge and/or experience by the students?

Humanities	4.04	3.82	3.79	4.21	3.96
Social Science	3.63	3.79	4.00	3.93	3.84
Natural Science	3.76	3.74	3.67	3.91	3.77
Liberal Arts		3.59	3.11	3.33	3.34
Special Studies	3.57	3.54	3.82	3.51	3.61
College Average	3.72	3.75	3.63	3.89	3.75

12. What was the extent of learning about the field of inquiry.

Humanities	4.18	3.83	4.01	4.07	4.02
Social Science	3.95	4.11	4.12	3.96	4.03
Natural Science	3.80	3.65	3.86	4.07	3.84
Liberal Arts		3.68	2.94	3.76	3.46
Special Studies	3.96	3.66	3.82	3.69	3.78
College Average	3.99	3.89	3.68	3.95	3.88

13. What was the extent of learning about skillful writing.

Humanities	3.72	3.49	3.74	3.63	3.64
Social Science	3.10	3.32	3.47	3.30	3.30
Natural Science	2.96	3.10	3.43	2.83	3.08
Liberal Arts		3.38	2.32	3.13	2.94
Special Studies	3.62	3.41	3.50	3.45	3.49
College Average	3.33	3.39	3.15	3.34	3.30

14. To what extent did you become involved in the course?

Humanities	4.17	3.92	4.16	3.99	4.06
Social Science	3.83	3.94	4.01	3.99	3.94
Natural Science	3.64	3.95	3.73	4.04	3.84
Liberal Arts		3.59	2.82	3.59	3.33
Special Studies	4.15	3.70	4.10	3.67	3.90
College Average	3.93	3.88	3.66	3.93	3.85

15. To what extent did you expend time and effort in studying for this course?

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	3	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	4.21	3.92	4.11	4.09	4.08
Social Science	4.09	4.05	4.15	3.98	4.07
Natural Science	3.82	4.20	3.89	4.09	4.00
Liberal Arts		3.59	3.35	3.67	3.54
Special Studies	3.83	3.67	4.17	3.48	3.79
College Average	4.05	3.93	3.87	3.93	3.94

16. What was your attendance in class?

Humanities	4.28	4.06	4.30	4.40	4.26
Social Science	4.40	4.30	4.41	4.41	4.38
Natural Science	4.28	4.30	4.48	4.23	4.32
Liberal Arts		4.17	4.03	4.09	4.10
Special Studies	4.40	3.84	4.45	4.14	4.21
College Average	4.36	4.14	4.28	4.33	4.28

17. Overall rating of the course.

Humanities	4.37	3.94	4.25	4.29	4.21
Social Science	3.90	4.03	4.17	4.07	4.04
Natural Science	3.84	3.80	3.89	4.30	3.96
Liberal Arts		3.72	2.83	3.45	3.33
Special Studies	4.33	4.04	4.31	3.78	4.11
College Average	4.06	3.97	3.75	4.07	3.96

18. To what extent were your expectations in taking the course achieved?

Humanities	4.24	3.57	4.25	4.20	4.06
Social Science	3.81	3.79	4.04	3.86	3.88
Natural Science	3.57	3.55	3.55	3.91	3.64
Liberal Arts		3.37	2.95	3.05	3.12
Special Studies	3.92	3.82	4.03	3.44	3.80
College Average	3.90	3.68	3.64	3.82	3.76

19. Needed to meet a requirement.

Humanities	40	26	23	23	28
Social Science	58	35	45	41	44
Natural Science	78	60	80	81	74
Liberal Arts		90	92	73	85
Special Studies	68	53	55	44	55
College Average	58	39	58	45	50

20. Needed to prepare for a career or graduate school.

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	4	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	31	25	21	31	27
Social Science	49	39	36	42	41
Natural Science	56	75	36	21	47
Liberal Arts		17	7	5	9
Special Studies	27	24	24	30	26
College Average	42	32	23	34	32

21. The subject of the course was interesting.

Humanities	69	85	94	89	84
Social Science	54	73	84	80	72
Natural Science	58	55	67	60	60
Liberal Arts		72	24	55	50
Special Studies	55	60	48	78	60
College Average	58	75	64	77	68

22. The professor had a good reputation.

Humanities	43	44	56	61	51
Social Science	32	46	46	40	41
Natural Science	36	10	33	36	28
Liberal Arts		24	13	23	20
Special Studies	43	62	21	52	44
College Average	37	44	35	44	40

23. The course was less demanding required less work.

Humanities	12	13	5	7	9
Social Science	15	5	6	6	8
Natural Science	16	0	2	4	5
Liberal Arts		10	5	9	8
Special Studies	20	31	7	36	23
College Average	15	11	5	10	10

24. This was the only course which fit into my schedule.

Humanities	6	9	9	11	8
Social Science	13	9	10	7	9
Natural Science	12	0	4	13	7
Liberal Arts		10	7	5	7
Special Studies	18	15	7	26	16
College Average	12	10	8	11	10

25. All other reasons, please specify on the printed sheet.

AREA	SESSION 1	2	3	4	AVERAGE FOR YEAR
Humanities	2	5	1	1	2
Social Science	7	1	1	0	2
Natural Science	0	0	0	10	2
Liberal Arts		3	2	0	1
Special Studies	7	5	0	14	6
College Average	5	3	1	3	3

Averages of Questions 1 - 18

Humanities	4.18	3.88	4.11	4.15	4.08
Social Science	3.87	3.97	4.10	3.96	3.98
Natural Science	3.79	3.78	3.81	4.05	3.86
Liberal Arts	0.00	3.73	3.02	3.53	3.43
Special Studies	4.09	3.84	4.12	3.72	3.94
College Average	3.96	3.89	3.73	3.96	3.89

NEW COLLEGE, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Course Evaluation Questionnaire

Course_____ Instructor_____

Session _____ Month/Year_____ Your Academic Year_____

Your Concentration_____ Is this a required course?_____ Grade you expect____

This questionnaire is designed to evaluate and improve New College courses. All answers will be anonymous.

Please rate each of the dimensions of this course according to the following code:

A = Very Good/Well B = Good/Well C = Average
D = Poor E = Very Poor Blank = Not Applicable

1. _____ Quality of class presentations, lectures and demonstrations.

2. _____ How well did class discussion help in the learning experience of this class?

3. _____ How valuable were the assigned readings to you in your studies of this course topic?

4. _____ Value of papers, projects, problems and other additional assignments.

5. _____ Did this course have a major focus or direction which you understood?

6. _____ To the extent that you agreed this course had a major focus, was that focus or director meaningful to you?

7. _____ How valuable was the exam or exams as a tool to help you to learn?

Comments: Use this space to add further comments you want to make concerning the first seven questions which are on specific aspects of the course.

_____

_____

_____

8. _____ Overall rating of the instructor inside the classroom.

9. _____ Availability of the instructor outside of the classroom.

10. _____ How well did the professor present the material/content of the course in a logical order that helped you to learn.

11. _____ Did the course assume an appropriate level of prior knowledge and/or experience by the students?

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Comments about the Instructor & Instruction: _____

_____

_____

12. _____ What was the extent of learning about the field of inquiry.

13. _____ What was the extent of learning about skillful writing.

14. _____ To what extent did you become involved in the course?

15. _____ To what extent did you expend time and effort in studying for this course?

16. _____ What was your attendance in class?

Comments on your Personal Involvement: _____

_____

_____

17. _____ Overall rating of the course.

18. _____ To what extent were your expectations in taking the course achieved?

Mark A for each of the following items which were a reason for your taking the course. Leave blank those items which were not reasons for your taking the course.

19. _____ Needed to meet a requirement.

20. _____ Needed to prepare for a career or graduate school.

21. _____ The subject of the course was interesting.

22. _____ The professor had a good reputation.

23. _____ The course wass less demanding, required less work.

24. _____ This was the only course which fit into my schedule.

25. _____ All other reasons, please specify on the printed sheet.

General Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____